

# Plasencia's hard work brings Olympic berth

By Jim Ferstle  
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INDIANAPOLIS — Mark Nenow said that even though he didn't make the U.S. Olympic team in 10,000-meter run, he was glad that Steve Plasencia did.

Plasencia, a former Minnesota Gopher, was second behind Bruce Bickford. Wadena native Pat Porter was third and Nenow of Anoka fourth in the 10,000-meter final Monday night at the U.S. Olympic track and field trials. The top three runners

make the team.

"Now we can be friends, right," said Porter, as he greeted Plasencia with a high five after the race.

If Plasencia has one thing within the tight-knit community of distance runners, it is the respect of his rivals. They know his running style is awkward. They know he is fragile and prone to injury, and they know how hard he's worked to earn his spot near the top of the heap of American distance runners.

Few people recognized Plasencia's potential. Even his sponsor signed him only to one-year contracts, subject to cancellation if he had a bad year. Despite this lack of respect from the sport's administrators, Plasencia made the commitment to move to Eugene, Ore., after he graduated from the University of Minnesota in 1978, to train for his childhood dream, a spot on the Olympic team.

Plasencia always has had a good deal of self-confidence. He designed much of his

own training or sought the help of his high school coach at Cooper, Milan Madar, when he wanted to do something different from what his college coach recommended.

"Steve is successful because he does it right," said Bob Sevens, an adviser to Joan Benoit Samuelson and former head coach for Athletics West, the Nike-sponsored team that supports Plasencia. "He doesn't waste his talent by running a lot of road

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races or trying to run for the buck. He's probably the smartest American distance runner."

Using advice from several sources, his accumulated knowledge and the training scheme he formulated with the help of his friend and coaching adviser, Rob Lyden, Plasencia mapped his route to Seoul in the spring of 1988. He skipped an attempt to qualify for the U.S. cross country team because of a minor injury and a need to lay the foundation for his summer racing schedule by logging miles of roadwork.

On July 5, he rented a cabin in Nashville, Ind., just south of Indianapolis, and he lived and trained there until the first heat of the 10K last Friday night. But even the heat training was not enough to prevent the Indy weather from taking its toll.

"I got a stitch at different points during the race," said Plasencia of the trial heat. "I think the reason that pace was so slow in the final was because everybody hurt bad for the last half of the race on Friday night."

"The heat and humidity really hammered us, and nobody wanted to risk feeling that bad again in the final."

Lyden searched for some porous mesh to replace the fabric on Plasencia's jersey. And, he and Plasencia analyzed what the likely scenario would be for the other's tactics in the final. They predicted the race would probably come down to a battle between Bickford, Plasencia, Porter and Nenow.

Plasencia's strategy was to be in a position to make the team with a lap to go in the race. And, although Bickford had opened up a big lead at one point in the race, Plasencia almost caught him with his last lap sprint that started 300 meters from the finish.

Nenow not only failed in his bid to make the 10,000-meter team, he also spent the rest of the night in the hospital.

"I bet I drank about a couple of gallons of water in about an hour," said Nenow, who was drinking so that he could produce a urine sample quickly for drug testing. He became ill when he went back to his room.

"Then, I started getting arrhythmias," Nenow said. "I could feel my heart racing. That kind of scared me. So, they called an ambulance and carted me off to the hospital."

"When I finally got the IV, within an hour everything was all right. But I hardly got any sleep."

Because he didn't make the team at 10K, Nenow will run the 5K, starting with the first of three heats tonight.

Craig Virgin, the only American to win the World Cross Country Championship and a former U.S. record holder in the 10,000-meters, said he couldn't understand how Porter can be so dominant at cross country (where he has won six straight U.S. titles) and so mediocre in track.

"He should be our best in track, too," Virgin said.

Porter answers such challenges by counter-punching. What other American has made two Olympic track teams at 10K in the past eight years, asks Porter? And he says he is still developing as a track racer, a discipline that requires more seasoning.

Also, cross country is his love, his passion. Porter considers the world cross country champion to be the greatest distance runner in the world, a title a mere track racer cannot claim. So, Porter saves his best for the fall sport and has yet to attempt to be as dominant running in circles around the 400-meter oval.